



Wisconsin Celebrates National Farm to School Month

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MADISON – Seven AmeriCorps Farm to School sites across Wisconsin work throughout the year to increase local foods in school and educate students about healthy choices. In October, this work is in the spotlight during National Farm to School Month.

“October brings a bountiful harvest in Wisconsin, and it is the perfect time to celebrate the contributions of farmers and educators through National Farm to School Month,” said Camilla Vargas, the AmeriCorps Farm to School Program Manager at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). “AmeriCorps Farm to School bridges the gap and connects students to where their food comes from.”



Wisconsin AmeriCorps Farm to School members take a photo during training this fall. October is National Farm to School Month.

AmeriCorps Farm to School in Wisconsin has 15 members working with over 10,000 students to decrease childhood obesity by promoting healthy eating habits in students and increasing access to local foods in schools. The AmeriCorps members focus on community outreach, identifying and addressing hurdles for local food procurement, and nutrition education, developing and implementing curriculum and wellness plans to teach students.

One of the new AmeriCorps Farm to School sites this year is Live54218 in Brown County. Live54218 is working for a healthy community through the promotion of eating 5 fruits and vegetables, drinking 4 bottles of water, having less than 2 hours of screen time, participating in at least 1 hour of physical activity and sleeping 8 hours a night.

“As a community obesity prevention group, we are excited to be partnering with three local school districts to pursue the development of a comprehensive Farm to School Program,” said Jennifer Van Den Elzen, the Live54218 Director. “Although we are just at the beginning of our efforts already we have formed a Farm to School task force and begun mapping out existing efforts as well as reaching out to local farmers.”

Other sites in Wisconsin include: Growing Power, REAP Food Group, University of Wisconsin-Extension Crawford County, Viroqua School District, Spooner School District and a partnership between the Ashland, Washburn and Bayfield School Districts. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack toured the Catholic Multicultural Center on October 1, which does work with the REAP Food Group AmeriCorps Farm to School site.

Last year, participating students were given pre and post assessments. Of those surveyed, 79% of students increased their knowledge of local foods and 56% of students had a shift in attitude toward healthy eating. The Wisconsin AmeriCorps Farm to School sites continue to work to develop their programs to increase their impact.

“Future plans include piloting a school gardening component as well as nutrition education efforts during and after the school day to support consumption of the new fruits and vegetables students will be seeing on their lunch trays,” added Van Den Elzen of Live54218.

The Wisconsin AmeriCorps Farm to School Program began in 2008. October was officially designated as National Farm to School Month in 2010 when Congress approved House Resolution 1655. Learn more at farmtoschoolmonth.org. For information about Wisconsin’s AmeriCorps Farm to School, contact Camilla Vargas at 608-224-2017 or Camilla.Vargas@wisconsin.gov. ###